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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8852  
RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1350  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1527  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0605  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0638  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
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RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA J2X CAMP LEMONIER DJ

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KWMN](#) [SOCI](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: ERITREA BANS FGM

¶1. With a prevalence rate of 89%, the Government of Eritrea (GSE) took a significant step and in March 2007 banned female genital mutilation (FGM). In Proclamation 158/2007, the GSE noted that FGM violates women's basic human rights and endangers the health of women, and with one sentence abolished FGM in Eritrea. Furthermore, the proclamation identified performing, supporting or promoting FGM as a criminal act subject to fines and imprisonment. To complement this, the proclamation also states that an individual who knows "that female circumcision is to take place or has taken place, and fails, without good cause, to warn or inform...the proper authorities promptly...shall be punishable by a fine of up to one thousand (1,000) nakfa" (USD 66).

¶2. The GSE, under the leadership of the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) over the past ten years has prioritized their efforts to eliminate FGM in Eritrea. In collaboration with UNICEF and UNFPA, the GSE established a national plan of action that includes representatives from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, the National Union of Eritrean Youth and NUEW to combat FGM. The plan of action uses a community based approach, seeking to educate women and young girls on their rights, advocating ultimately for the eradication of FGM for the community, by the community. The current law grew out of these community efforts, particularly in Eritrea's lowlands, with village councils establishing their own laws and punishments. According to one UNICEF employee, community response initially advocated for more stringent punishments than outlined in the proclamation, however realized that fines perceived as too extreme are difficult to enforce.

¶3. An analysis of the GSE Demographic Health Surveys from 1995 and 2002 show a 6% drop in reports of FGM in women between the ages of 15-49 in Eritrea. Presently, some believe that the rate may have dropped even more thanks to community efforts to raise awareness of the risks and hazards of FGM. UNICEF points to a short documentary made several years ago that has been shown to various communities. Reportedly very graphic and descriptive, the 20 minute video has a powerful effect and some have even pointed directly to the video as what led them to act against FGM. The high level of organization of the GSE's sole political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) has also been credited for its efforts. The structure of the party at the local level and its ability to reach out to nearly every member of a community play a key role in efforts by UNICEF, UNFPA and the GSE to combat FGM.

¶4. Comment: The GSE's efforts to combat FGM are to be commended and are a step in the right direction for fighting FGM. Within Eritrea, anti-FGM proponents have applauded this new law. Given the GSE's

on-going human rights abuses in so many other areas, the GSE's recognition of FGM as a human right's issue, and its willingness to do something about it, highlights the conundrum that is Eritrea.  
End Comment.

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